

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD BY  
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CHAIRMAN  
DVA VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
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**Introduction**

Chairwoman Herseth Sandlin, Ranking Member Boozman and members of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, I am pleased to appear before you today on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) Secretary's Veterans Advisory Committee on Education (VACOE) to provide the Committee's view on how the GI Bill can be modified to expand the accelerated benefit program beyond the high technology industry. I have had the pleasure of working with the members and staff of the committee for many years as the committee worked to improve various GI Bills.

**Remarks**

In general, much has been done in recent years to provide service members, veterans, and other eligible persons with greater opportunities to use the education and training benefits to which they are entitled. Yet, the nature of today's global economy demands that we continue to strive to help our workforce - especially our veterans - to gain new knowledge and learn new skills in order to maximize their contributions to the Nation.

It is the VACOE's view that even with the recent increases in the monthly benefit amount, some veterans find it cost prohibitive to enroll in an institutional program that will provide the knowledge and skills necessary for them to reach their occupational or professional objective.

Removing the current restriction that requires enrollment in a program that leads to employment in high technology industries would allow greater opportunities for more veterans to use their GI Bill benefits. Additionally, we recommend revising the law to limit the length of a program that qualifies for accelerated payment to two years or less. The discussions that led up to the enactment of the original legislation centered on short term high technology courses. The language that was enacted does not impose any limitations on length, therefore all high technology programs, including many four year degree programs, qualify. We also recommend using the "base rate" because veterans who take advantage of the \$600 buy-in, 34/30 conversions, and kicker recipients, or any combination thereof, can be penalized by having their additional monthly payment disqualify them for accelerated payment under the current 200% calculation method.

## **Processing**

Processing time for accelerated payment allowances is on average approximately eight weeks for original and two weeks for supplemental claims. With regard to the adequacy of that timeframe this may pose a problem to veterans who are enrolled in short term, high cost programs.

Claims processing is a complicated, time consuming endeavor which could be made more efficient and effective with the adoption of a Total Force GI Bill.

It is the VACOE's view that the accelerated payment provision should be restricted to non-degree two years or less programs. A good example where the accelerated payment provision needs to be expanded is commercial driver license training programs. Nationally truck driver programs are relatively expensive because of the complexities of today's equipment and the demands of new licensing requirements for specialized loads. An opportunity to use the accelerated payment provision of the law would allow more veterans to pursue their chosen occupation.

A word of caution, by expanding eligibility for accelerated payment the opportunity for abuse increases. Therefore, the DVA and, particularly State Approving Agencies (SAA), will have to be ever more vigilant.

## **Summary**

The VACOE supports expanding the accelerated payment provision of section 3014A, title 38 USC, to include short term two years or less, high cost, non-degree programs. As aforementioned, the committee also understands there will be a need for increased vigilance on the part of the DVA and SAAs to limit waste, fraud and abuse.

## **Closing**

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Advisory Committee on Veterans Education regarding accelerated payment provision of title 38 USC. Thank you also for your efforts to make improvements to the education and training assistance programs that have been made available to those who defend the freedoms that we all so thoroughly enjoy. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.